

FREE THOUGHTS
CONCERNING A
SEPARATION
OF THE
PEOPLE CALLED *METHODISTS*,
FROM THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

ADDRESSED TO

The Preachers in the Methodist Connection.

BY A LAYMAN OF THE METHODIST SOCIETY.

My Son fear thou the Lord and the King : and
meddle not with them that are given to change. For
their calamity shall rise suddenly ; and who knoweth
the ruin of them both ?

Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

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THREE THOUGHTS

STAY A LITTLE

AND BE A LITTLE



THE END OF THE WORLD

FREE THOUGHTS, &c.

TO think for himself is the hereditary right of every man born into the world. Since then a Separation of the People called *Methodists* from the Church of *England* is become at present a common Topic of conversation, it seems lawful for every man to offer his free thoughts upon that Subject. I shall therefore beg leave to throw out a few remarks as they occur to my mind, and shall leave it to the candid Reader to judge for himself. But before I proceed, I shall just briefly enquire 1st. What is the Church of *England*? 2dly. Who are the *Methodists*?

1st. What is the Church of *England*? By the Church of *England* is generally understood, I believe, that body of professing Christians who worship God according to the form laid down in the Book of Common-Prayer, and who profess to believe the Creeds and hold the Doctrines therein contained. This Church is governed by a Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and the inferior Orders of the Clergy, each in subordination to the other according to their respective offices, and all in Subordination to his *Britannic* Majesty. So that no material alteration can be made either in the Government, Form, or Doctrine of this Church without his consent, who is styled “Defender of the Faith.”

2d. Who are the *Methodists*? They are a Company of religious people raised up in the Church of *England* (for the Dissenters gathered in among them are comparatively few) whose first Teachers were, and still are

Ministers of that Church. These first Instruments of God, finding their work to increase beyond what they could attend to, and having no other ordained Clergymen to assist them, at length consented to be assisted by those Laymen, who were raised up and *separated by God* for this work. These Laymen were called *Methodist* Preachers, not *Ministers*; their call being not to baptize but preach the Gospel (as they themselves professed) and God abundantly witnessed by the conversion of thousands and tens of thousands. And this conversion was not from one System of opinions to another; but from Sin and Satan to the living God; yea, many were converted from the most abandoned wickedness, and became holy and devoted men; and that, because these special Messengers of God (for such they may be called) according to the example set them, rushed *not only* into every opening door, but sought the vagrant Souls in the fields, in the streets, and lanes of the City; not counting their lives dear to themselves, so they might finish their course with joy, and save some of the precious Souls for whom Christ died. All this time, after the example, and by the advice of Mr. W——, under whose care they laboured, they continued in the Church; nor was this continuance at any time contrary to the judgment of the majority of them when in Conference assembled. To these extraordinary Ambassadors of Christ have been added, of late years, two or three Clergymen, whose hearts God stirred up to assist in this glorious work.

Why then should these separate from the Church *now*? Is it because the Government of the Church is not Apostolical? No;—That is not yet made a Matter of Conscience; whatever it may be when a Separation is determined upon.

Is it because the form of Divine Service is not Apostolical? No;—for, though the Preachers in general make no use of the form of prayer appointed by the Church Service; yet they do not condemn it, looking on modes of worship or forms of prayer (as they justly may) to be non-essentials.

Is it because the Doctrines of the Church are not pure? No, certainly. These they hold and strenuously contend for, as they are contained in the Book of Common-Prayer and the Homilies.

Is it then that the Churches are shut against them *now*, or that they cannot have the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper? No, assuredly. They never were more welcome to the Churches of *Great-Britain* and *Ireland* than now; many of the Clergy finding a secret pleasure in having such a number of Communicants. But,

One Argument for the Separation is,—“The Clergy are not converted men, not experienced in the work of God upon the Soul; therefore they are not fit to minister in holy things, nor can a blessing attend what they do.”—It is to be feared indeed that few are *converted*, in the general acceptation of the word; yet several of them fear God. And unless it is first proved that the blessing depends on the intention or faith of the minister, and not on that of the worthy Communicant, the argument above is inconclusive. Besides, the experience of thousands of the *Methodists*, whose minds were not poisoned by those who rail against the Church and Clergy, proves that God will bless his own Children by *any* means. And in this case we may apply the Prophet *Isaiah's* words: *Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen and vine-dressers.* (*Isaiah lxi. 5.*) Would not the Criminal deserve to die, who should refuse the King's pardon because it was brought by the hand of a condemned person?

A Second Argument is,—“We lose many of those children whom we have begotten by the Gospel, and who are therefore very dear to us, because we have not the Ordinances regularly amongst us.” Now, supposing it to be granted that some have left us and joined Dissenting Congregations; yet I must observe 1st. many of these were originally Dissenters, or had imbibed Republican principles; so that to them the transference was very easy: besides, very few of these went
B 3 away

away until their love to God and their Brethren began to wax cold; then they were easily offended, and so separated. 2dly. Among ourselves have men arisen speaking perverse things against the Church, and taught, both by example and persuasion, that pernicious custom of strolling from one Dissenting Congregation to another; which caused several to separate from us. It had been well perhaps if these rotten members had been cut off before they infected those that were sound. 3dly. On the other hand, well meaning men amongst us have opposed the favourite tenets or doctrines of Dissenters with a zeal far removed from the meekness recommended by the Apostle to *Timothy* (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.) and this caused others to depart. 4thly. Some amongst us preach only a part of the Gospel: nor are they content unless they contradict their brethren who hold out *holiness* as the prize of our high calling here. By this very thing thousands are prevented from running the race set before them; and having nothing more in view after Justification, no other Goal to run to, or prize to contend for, they fall into *Calvinian* dotages, or, with *Demas*, love the present world again.

Mr. W—— in his Tour through the Kingdom finding one Society much decreased, upon inquiry found they had left off going to Church; upon which he remarks in his Journal, “It is no wonder they should leave us.”

But will our having the Ordinances, &c. prevent our people from going away? Does it effectually prevent it in *London*, where those very Clergymen who are pillars in the work, officiate? No,—and if not, how much less, when Lay-Preachers are ordained to officiate, against which Ordination both Churchmen and Dissenters have their prejudices.

Again, it may be argued,—“The Church of *England* is fallen, therefore we should separate from her.”—

Yes, if we wish to pull her down. This reason may be plausible but not solid. For, *first*, she is not fallen so long as there are so many thousands still in connection with her who know the truth as it is in Jesus.

Nor,

Nor, *secondly*, is there any Scripture ground for separating any further than we *have* done. We are separated from the immorality of fallen Church-Men, and by our Christian fellowship among ourselves reprove the want of it in others; and so they understand it, and have often wished we would separate, for then we would be no longer a reproof to them. Besides there is no danger of *our* members being corrupted by the Church; and there is some ground of hope that *they*, as many have been, will be sanctified by us; as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Again, others may roundly assert,—“The time is fully come that we should be an independent Body of Christians.” If God has made this known, I wish to know how? Is it by his word, or by his providence? If by his word, I confess myself ignorant of it. Indeed by *Moses* he commands the *Israelites* to separate themselves from the Tents of *Korah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*; but I suppose none amongst the *Methodists* will conclude that the Church is in the State of those wicked men, when they spread Sedition through the Camp. Nor did he, who hath the seven Spirits of God, command those in *Sardis* who had not defiled their garments, to separate from their dead Pastor or the rest of the congregation.—If it is by his providence, what are the circumstances? Is it because the offence or scandal of Lay-Preachers is in a great degree ceased? Because we are becoming honourable, therefore our ambition is fired to become still *more* honourable? O cursed ambition! what devastation hast thou made in heaven and earth, among both Angels and Men! There is no safer rule to judge of the will of God by his providence, than by the success he has been pleased to give to the labours of our laymen on the present plan; and this is corroborated by the very little use he has made of any person who got ordained and separated from us. Therefore let every man abide in his calling according to the will of God.

But here it may be still further argued,—“The good effects

effects of a Separation are already seen in the Continent of *America*." Whatever may be said about the *American* States; or supposing that Providence may have there pointed out the way; yet the reasons upon which that Separation took place have no existence either in *Great-Britain* or *Ireland*: therefore till we are on the same footing, its good effect *there* has nothing to recommend it *here*.

" But as it is probable that a Separation will take place after Mr. W——'s decease, is it not better that whatever is done in that way should be done in his life-time?" No.—It is neither probable that it *will* take place; and even admitting it *should*, it will not be done better now. It is not probable; because, as a matter of such importance cannot take place till it is first investigated and fully considered in general Conference, it will be found that there are still two for one among the Preachers, who know their calling, and prefer the saving souls in the *good old way* (a way approved by God and man) to the honour and snare of a Gown, and the danger of becoming as *salt that has lost its savour*. But, admitting the necessity of the thing, it will not be better done now. The Cause of God would be hurt thro' the indelible blot it would fix upon Mr. W——'s Character as long as his name shall be remembered. If he, after the astonishing labours of near half a Century in the itinerant Plan, in spite of honour and dishonour, in the greatest contempt of worldly glory; and after having begotten by the Gospel a glorious company of Sons, with whom he was not ashamed to speak with his enemies in the gate; if he, I say, even *he himself*, should hold out to these his Sons the Soul-destroying bait of worldly glory, the damning honour that cometh of men, by putting a gown on them which they did not seek or expect; what would the world say, what would it think? Besides, if he should proceed as he has begun; it would be highly injurious to the sense, to the feelings, and to the character of the most respectable of the Preachers. To their sense, by not consulting

ing them in open Conference: to their feelings, by raising some to such dignity over them; and to their character, by holding them out to the world as less worthy. Though the above reason may seem plausible or sound policy to some; yet, methinks, it is not sound Divinity to *use deceit*. Oh! who will stand forth and shew our aged Father and friend these rocks against which the Ship is like to be dashed in pieces? O that some good Angel would take him by the hand and lead him through this thorny maze which is strewn with flowers of Satan's creating!

Arise ye TRUE sons of the grey-headed *Elijah*; and let not his laurels be trodden in the dust. Let not his glory be tarnished. Ye have yet TEN parts in this *Son* and *Servant* of God. Let no son of *Bichri* say, "To thy tents, O *Israel*," and leave him to himself. Or if any one should say so, do ye say with *Elisba*, "as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, we will not leave him." What an odium would these bring upon this *Servant* of God, who would cause him to nullify what has been published to the world as his mature resolves concerning the Church, in conjunction with those with whom he conferred! See the answers to several Questions in the minutes of Conference, together with Mr. W——'s twelve reasons against a Separation from the Church printed many years ago, besides what he has said occasionally upon the Subject in conversation, in private letters, from the Pulpit and from the Press.

That a Separation from the Church at this time can be of no real use to the interests of religion, is, methinks, already apparent from what I have already hinted; but the evils consequent upon it may still more fully appear by shewing what we are likely to suffer or lose by such a Separation.

First, as many who are zealous for the Church have joined our Societies, we may conclude that, upon a Separation, many of these will be offended; some will withdraw, and in future few that are thus zealous will unite with us: for, those in general that are saved
from

from bigotry are established believers, not half awakened Sinners.

Again, as a Separation implies Ordination (and vice versa) this, in *my* apprehension, is attended with a train of evils. The thing itself, as to the manner, is new in this age, and liable to many objections; but waving these for the present, and even admitting the legality of the Institution, who can deny that any three of those Elders thus ordained, may not as lawfully ordain whom they please? Besides, Ordination will be a bone of contention, or apple of Discord among the Preachers; for it will be impossible to chuse such as may be thought most proper, or indeed *any* without giving huge offence to others. How hardly do some bear to have one of their brethren appointed Assistant over them (as it is called) although his trust is but temporary, and his office not the most eligible, on account of the care and labour it requires! How much harder will it be for *such* to bear that their inferior, both in sense and usefulness, and perhaps Junior Brother should be preferred before them, and privileged to approach the Altar of God, while *they* are fenced off to mix with the populace, or go away without a crumb; and especially when this preference is not temporary, as the Office of an Assistant, but for life.

Again, those who are rejected, will rarely be preserved from speaking evil of the Institution, and of their brethren; who, however holy, will scarcely be preserved from giving offence; for, they will be watched with a jealous eye, and many will be ready to say to them, "Ye take too much upon you, ye Sons of *Levi*."—Thus the bond of union, which has so long subsisted upon the primitive plan, will be weakened, and divisions most probably ensue. Besides, as these Gownsmen increase in number, the Government will more and more devolve upon them; so that if the obnoxious *Deed* should remain in full force and virtue, one of these Clergymen may be continued for life in whatever place he chuses to reside. A very desirable thing indeed! But hereby the itinerant plan will

will be gradually weakened, or continued only by the *raw lads* upon trial. Or if the above is denied to any of our canonical brethren, they are in such a capacity of separating and setting up for their own hand as they never were in before. And two or three of those Elders or Presbyters, thus separating, may form a Presbytery of relief, and open an Asylum for every disaffected *H—p—n*, *M——r*, and *P—l—r* in the kingdom; and so divisions and subdivisions are likely to ensue until they have rent the Church and scattered her Members like the limbs of *Abfyrus's* body.

It is truly astonishing indeed that men who are entrusted with the care of souls should so readily adopt the Devil's maxim—"Divide and then destroy." It is strange to tell, that after 1700 years experience the present generation seems to be no wiser than those that are gone! Here I might refer my reader to the history of the Church of *Corinth* in *St. Paul's* day. I might remind him of the division which broke out in the Second Century between *Victor*, Bishop of *Rome*, and the *Asiatic* Churches concerning Easter. I might point him to the controversy which arose between the same Churches and *Stephen*, Bishop of *Rome*, concerning the baptism of heretics in the Third Century.—To the still more violent one in the Fourth Century, upon the Election of the Bishop of *Carthage* by the *African* Bishops, without waiting for the approbation of those of *Numidia*. To the shocking scenes which ensued in the Fifth Century upon the excommunication of *Nestorius* by *Cyril*, Bishop of *Alexandria*; and to the controversy in the same Century between *Pelagius* and heated *Augustin*. I might lead my reader through the Labyrinth of controversy and its effects down through every succeeding age to the Sixteenth Century, when the Devil, as usual, divided those eminent men *Martin Luther* and others, whom God raised up in that day to reform his Church: nay, we might come still nearer home, and behold with Sorrow the effects of that division which he caused between Messrs. *J—n W——y*, and *G——e W——d*, in the present Century:

tury : and which we sensibly feel to the present day. But I shall not dwell on these melancholy scenes, and, after having pointed out one evil consequence more arising from a Separation, I shall conclude.

While the present Plan continues, if a Preacher prefers ease to labour, or if his health will not bear the fatigue of an Itinerant, he generally thinks of providing for himself and family, if he has one, in some way of trade or business ; and some that have thus retired are useful in their place, and are an honour to us without any expence. But when any have got a Gown, we cannot expect that they will retire, and sink into obscure farmers or common tradesmen. Be this far from them, so to degrade their Office, or retire without a pension ! Or if some of these *Reverend Gentlemen* should be excluded from the Methodist Connection on account of their immorality, &c. &c. will they not turn *Buckle-beggars* for a livelihood ? Yes, and to these will resort every Villain or Sensualist who desires to deceive a woman under the pretext of marriage, and after he has had his desire, will spurn her from his presence, telling her it was no legal marriage. Is not this then as the letting out of water, and who shall gather it up ? Is it not about to deluge the whole Land ? Saye, Lord, or thy Servants perish !

F I N I S.

